



Interview ▶ It is estimated that around 50% of the documentation and the photographic and



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The head of the Archives and Document Management area, Lidia Arbués.

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Susanna Vela's replacement at the head of the National Archives from 2020, Lidia Arbués, worked as documentation management support for the various Government Departments from 2006 to 2009, the year in which she was referred to the archive as a technique of inventories and classification of assets.

–Was your job very different before you were at the head of the organization?

–The truth is that the qualitative and quantitative change, in terms of responsibilities, of my position is very noticeable. It's a major change. It is not about having so much work in terms of documentation, but rather it is more focused on the implementation and control of the budget, contracts, monitoring of the organization's policies and decision-making. However, the moment Susanna leaves her public position and returns to the archive, I will continue to be a technician.

–What state is the National Archive in right now?

–Currently we have a lot of work in the treatment of documentation in

different supports such as scrolls and graphics. But what really occupies most of our time is the digitization process that started almost 10 years ago. In this way, we try to make information more accessible to users and citizens. Our support work in the digitization of the general administration is also noteworthy. At the moment when electronic information has the same value as physical, we will have to work hard.

–Could you explain how you collaborate with the ministries?

–We provide complete advice on the processing of documentation, the organization and indexing of files and the use of new electronic software. In the same way, we also manage the conservation and preservation of the Government's audios and videos so that, when necessary, they can easily find the required documentation, whether historical or administrative.

–How many pieces does the file consist of in total?

–We have close to 160,000 digitized documents, but there is still a higher amount than this to be transferred to the digital world, therefore, between textual, photogra-

phic and audiovisual material, we can safely talk about more than 300,000 units. We are talking about a total of 341 documentary funds, although the most numerous have already been digitized.

–Are new documents still being discovered?

–The truth is that new family funds are arriving. These bring us the original material and we usually make a copy and keep it. People are always happy to stick with the original, for obvious reasons.

–Only files from the Principality arrive?

–We also receive pieces from abroad, especially from Spain and France, but in particular we are receiving files relating to the era of the Catalan vegueries. The problem is that we still have to get a lot of Andorran documentation located in other countries. In some cases, there are users who need to travel and consult the information abroad, therefore, many valuable assets still need to be extracted in order to complete the archive to the greatest extent possible.

–Have you encountered obstacles when requesting documents from

other countries?

–If it is requested in advance, there is no problem, although there are some copies of originals that make us pay for them. Languages are not a barrier either, because, normally, a good part of the archives come



«The digitization process is also a method of protecting the archive, together with the laboratory»

from Catalonia.

–Returning to the origins, could you tell us since what year this organization has been active?

–The archive was created in 1975 at the request of the General Council in which, at first, many pieces were administered in microfilm format.

–What is the conservation method you use?

–We have a restoration laboratory to carry out a preventive conservation task in the event that holes, and fungi appear, especially in paper files.

–What about audiovisual and photographic formats?

–These formats are very sensitive and require stable temperature and humidity conditions that are more demanding than the textual genre. It is for this reason that the fund is divided into two distinct and separate parts. In the same way, we have fire extinguishing systems and specific jackets for some documents with the aim of preventing the proliferation of microorganisms on the papers and preventing them from being damaged. We also have metal cabinets as a fire protection system. Digitization

is another method of protection.

-From what year does the oldest document in your possession?

-The act of consecration of the church of Sant Cerni de Nagol of Sant Julià de Lòria, which dates from the year 1055. It is a parchment that authorizes the use of the building for religious worship and is found during conservation works of the church in the lower part of a slab.

-And the oldest photograph?

-This is a piece dating from 1840 from the Rossell family. An unidentified gentleman appears in the portrait. As for the oldest audiovisual material, this is a short documentary from 1935 called Andorra, the smallest republic in the world.

-From which period does the archive have more documents?

- We have many assets from the medieval period, but from the 15th century until the beginning of the 20th century it was a period of abundance. What we lack the most, obviously, is the period before the year 1400. Then the period between the wars must be highlighted. From the First World War until the 1980s a somewhat widespread disorder occurs due to the instability caused

by the conflicts. In the same way, we are also missing several documents from the 60s and 70s. Many of them are still in the possession of the institutions and it is difficult to find them all.

-What is the most complicated task in the archival field?

-Nothing is particularly complicated on a technical level. However, sometimes there are cumbersome and very laborious tasks, since you work with a very delicate material. It requires a lot of time. I would describe it as an ant job. Sometimes, the digitization of a fund is very extensive, because we have to outsource a very important chunk of information.

-What would be, approximately, the percentage of public contributions of archives and the percentage of private donations?

-In terms of the public part, we have different funds such as, for example, the Courts, the Seven Keys Archive, the General Council, the Batllia, and the parish funds of the municipalities, among others. These provide us with a larger volume of documents, but the private ones involve more varied units of files.

-Moving to the area of human re-



«The oldest document is the act of consecration of the church of Sant Cerni de Nagol which dates from the year 1055»

«Nearly 16,000 people consult the archive online and approximately half a thousand users do so in person»

sources, do you have enough archivists?

-We have a wide range of professionals for each type of task. However, it is never enough. We would go faster with more hands, obviously, but compared to other archives in other countries, we are doing well and have good human resources.

-Do you miss an alternative figure in this job?

-Perhaps we lack administrative archivists to deal with the institutions' documentation in a preventive manner and advance the work once it reaches the archive. Each time a fund is discovered, it requires a lot of analysis work. With this new figure, our work would be much easier.

-What is the level of interaction with citizens?

-The online archive is being used more and more with a total of 16,000 queries per year. In terms of face-to-face visits, we are around half a thousand each year.

-Which is the profile that most frequents the archive?

-There is everything. Many families come to carry out genealogical research or specific research by historians. People also come to ask for

old photographs to take home.

-Young people also come, right?

-Of course, mostly to look at photographs and old audiovisual material. The paper format is more attractive to the elderly.

-Do you have a dissemination campaign ready for the future?

-We currently have two online exhibitions on our website and a few days ago we published a small documentary about Radio Andorra. Usually for international days we do specials. It is likely that in the run-up to October 27th, the International Day of Audiovisual Heritage, we will present a new work. Apart from this, we will also go to schools and spread the word through social networks about the new compilations that we are completing.

-Are there plans to expand or invest in the archive?

-Right now we are in the process of moving to Rosaleda Hotel of Encamp. It is undoubtedly a bigger space to store all the assets and find more rooms to expand the deposits. It will also help us because we will share spaces with the Ministry of Culture and it will promote collaboration. ≡

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